

Seeing Is Believing

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While working in the motor pool one day at Fort Hood, Texas, I heard people yelling and running toward the gate. The buzz of activity got me curious, so I went to see what was happening. I couldn't tell what was going on when I got to the gate, but I later found out a sergeant in my company had burned his eyes. Apparently he'd been working on a HMMWV battery when it exploded, sending battery acid into his face. After this incident, we were all briefed on wearing our personal protective equipment. As it turned out, the sergeant was alright and his eyes weren't damaged permanently. However, he did say they burned like nothing he had ever felt before. I took this in but figured it could never happen to me. Boy was I wrong!

Six years later, while stationed at Fort Drum, N.Y., I was working on my car battery. Although I always wear PPE to protect my eyes and ears when I mow the lawn or work with power tools, it never crossed my mind to wear it while working on my car. No loud noises, no big deal. I'd forgotten about the incident at Fort Hood by then.

As I stood in my driveway and tried to pry off the battery cap, it suddenly broke free. It all happened so quickly I didn't have time to turn my head. I had a de'ja' vu moment as I felt my eyes burning like you wouldn't believe! Yep, I'd gotten battery acid in my eye just like that sergeant I'd forgotten about a few years before. I couldn't see, so I felt and bumped my way through the garage and stumbled into the house. My wife told me to flush my eye for 15 to 20 minutes, and that was bad enough. We went to the doctor's office after that, where they put dye in my eye and used a black light to check for injuries. I was lucky—my eye wasn't scratched. The doctor said flushing it right away had been a good thing and probably helped prevent a more serious injury.

I couldn't believe this happened to me. When it did, though, I immediately thought about that incident at Fort Hood. I now make it a point to wear eye protection whenever I work on a vehicle battery. The funny part of this story is I was getting my car ready for the drive to Fort Rucker, Ala., to take the Aviation Safety Officer Course!

When someone tells you to wear your PPE, listen up and do it. They're not doing it to merely hear themselves talk. They're probably speaking from experience and are just trying to protect you.

---FYI: When working with equipment or volatile substances, be sure to:

- **Always wear eye protection.**
- **Wear rubber gloves to protect your hands.**
- **If you need corrective lenses and handle batteries often, wear prescription glasses, not contacts.**
- **Do not smoke, have open flames or make sparks around a battery. Batteries emit an explosive gas.**
- **Make sure the vent holes in the vent caps are open to prevent a dangerous buildup of gasses.**

